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ABSTRACT

Drawing on interviews with 180 staff members from 45 public high schools in 15 states, this document examines the advantages and disadvantages of teacher participation in shared decision making. The settings of six high schools that had structured mechanisms for teacher participation in school decisions are described, and problems that emerged during shared decision making processes are presented: (1) conflicts between who participates and who does not; (2) conflicts among participants; and (3) internal conflicts--new and old ideas within the same individual. The problems caused by confusion regarding the locus of final decision authority are reviewed, and the need for teacher training in the content of issues faced by decision making bodies, in the processes of decision making, and in negotiation skills is explained. Next, the development of a school culture that supports participation and provides a sense of mutual respect and trust is discussed, and one school's collective management procedure is cited as an example. A final section discusses the potential of shared decision making given clear definition of staff members' roles and the organization's overall purpose. (20 references) (CLA)

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TROUBLE IN PARADISE
Teacher Conflicts in Shared Decision Making

by

Carol H. Weiss, Joseph Cambone,
and Alexander Wyeth

Harvard Graduate School of Education

Occasional Paper No. 8

April 1991

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NCEL OCCASIONAL PAPER SERIES

1. *Re-Thinking School Leadership: An Agenda for Research and Reform* by Lee G. Bolman, Susan Moore Johnson, Jerome T. Murphy, and Carol H. Weiss; Harvard University (February 1990)

   This paper presents a basic model of the relationship between leadership, situation, and outcomes. Personal characteristics of leaders and the situation in which leaders find themselves both influence what leaders do, which in turn influences the kinds of outcomes that they produce. Embedded in the model are three questions: "What is good school leadership?" "How does good school leadership come about?" and "What will good school leadership mean in the future?" Systematic ways of approaching these questions are also presented.

2. *Preparing School Administrators for the Twenty-First Century: The Reform Agenda* by Joseph Murphy; Vanderbilt University (May 1990)

   In the second wave of school reform reports and studies of the 1980s, much attention has been directed to issues of school administration and leadership. Yet, to date, no comprehensive analysis of these calls for changes in school administration has been undertaken. The purpose of this paper is to provide such a review. The goals of the paper are threefold: (1) to explain the reasons for the calls for reform of school administration, (2) to review the major studies and reports on education reform from 1982 to 1988 and (3) to discuss educational administration reform issues that need further attention.

3. *What Makes a Difference? School Context, Principal Leadership, and Student Achievement* by Philip Hallinger, Leonard Bickman, and Ken Davis; Vanderbilt University (June 1990)

   This paper addresses the general question, what makes a difference in school learning? We report the results of a secondary analysis of data collected as part of the Tennessee School Improvement Incentives Project. We utilized the instructional leadership model developed by researchers at the Far West Laboratory for Educational Research and Development to guide our analyses. This conceptual model makes provision for analysis of principal leadership in relation to features of the school environment, school-level organization, and student outcomes. The paper focuses on the following research questions: (1) What antecedents appear to influence principal leadership behavior? (2) What impact does principal leadership have on the organization and its outcomes? (3) To what extent is the Far West Lab instructional leadership framework supported empirically by the data collected in this study?

4. *The Teaching Project at the Edward Devotion School: A Case Study of a Teacher-Initiated Restructuring Project* by Katherine C. Boles; Harvard University (September 1990)

   School districts around the country are in the process of initiating projects to restructure their schools. A small but growing number of these restructuring projects have been initiated by teachers, but as yet little has been written documenting the experience of classroom practitioners involved in such efforts. The purpose of this study is to add teachers' voices to the literature on restructuring. This project restructured a portion of a school and altered the work of a group of third and fourth grade teachers.

5. *Educational Reform in the 1980s: Explaining Some Surprising Success* by Joseph Murphy; Vanderbilt University (September 1990)

In this paper issues of success and failure of reform initiatives are discussed from both sides of the aisle. The paper begins with a review of the financial, political, and organizational factors which normally support the position that reform measures are likely to result in few substantive improvements. Next the argument is made that educational reform recommendations have been surprisingly successful, and some speculations as to the reasons for this unexpected outcome are presented.

6. *New Settings and Changing Norms for Principal Development* by Philip Hallinger; Vanderbilt University and Robert Wimpelberg; University of New Orleans (January 1991)

Recently analysts have identified a variety of features that distinguish emerging administrative training programs from traditional ones. The rapid, but non-systematic growth in organizations providing administrative development services during the 1980's led to considerable natural variation in programmatic content as well as in organizational processes. In particular, significant variations emerged in the operation of state sponsored leadership academies and local principals' centers. The purpose of this paper is to analyze variations in current approaches to educational leadership development. The paper addresses three questions: (1) What is the range of variation among emerging staff development programs for school leaders on dimensions of program content and organizational process? (2) What can we learn from the naturally occurring variations in administrative development? (3) What are the most likely and promising directions for administrative development programs in the next decade?

7. *Images of Leadership* by Lee G. Bolman; Harvard University and Terrence E. Deal; Vanderbilt University (January 1991)

This project has undertaken a major study of the "frames", or orientations that leaders use to guide their understanding of their work. The investigators have developed a set of survey instruments to measure four leadership orientations (structural, human resource, political, and symbolic), and collected data from leaders approach their task constituents in both education and the private sector. Their research results show that the four leadership orientations do capture significant elements of how leaders approach their task, and that those leadership variables are significantly associated with effectiveness. The results further show that the variables which predict effectiveness as a *manager* are different from those that predict effectiveness as a *leader*. In particular, structural and rational orientations are primarily predictive of manager effectiveness. This research was reported at the AERA meeting in April, 1990.

8. *Trouble in Paradise: Teacher Conflicts in Shared Decision Making* by Carol H. Weiss, Joseph Cambone and Alexander Wyeth; Harvard University (April 1991)

Many educators advocate teacher participation in school decision making as one strategy for improving schools. Through interviews with teachers and administrators in high schools that have adopted some version of shared decision making, the authors locate both advantages and disadvantages. Advantages center on great commitment and "ownership" of decisions. Disadvantages include, besides heavy time demands, the necessity for teachers to confront and negotiate with each other, a process that requires skills many teachers lack. There may also be conflicts with administrators, often because of unclear definitions of authority and responsibility. Suggestions are made for overcoming such problems.

TROUBLE IN PARADISE

Teacher Conflicts in Shared Decision Making

by

Carol H. Weiss, Joseph Cambone, and Alexander Wyeth

One of the rallying cries of school reform in the 1990s is shared decision making in schools (Barth 1988, 1990, Carnegie Forum 1986, Sirotnik and Clark 1988). Like most such abbreviated catch phrases, the words cover a variety of meanings, but the brand of shared decision making we discuss here relates to teacher participation in school-level decisions. Such participation also goes by the name of "teacher empowerment;" it can be -- but is not necessarily -- implicated in site-based management; it can be part of schemes that include parent participation. We are concerned solely with what goes on in schools when teachers are given formal responsibility for participating in decision making.

Shared decision-making strategies are being promoted as a means to improve decisions about teaching and learning. Advocates make a variety of claims. Because teachers are close to classrooms and students, they presumably have important information to contribute to the decision-making process. As a consequence, it is expected that decisions will be better tuned to the needs of students. Advocates also claim that participation advances professionalism. When teachers have the opportunity to participate, they are not passive recipients of orders from above, but full-fledged professionals with latitude to shape the conditions under which they work and the kind of work they do. Another argument is that when teachers share in decision making, they become committed to the decisions that emerge. They "buy into" the decision; they feel a sense of ownership; therefore, they are more likely to see that decisions are actually implemented. For these and other reasons[1], schools in many places in the country are implementing changes that allow for greater teacher control over the decision process (Caldwell and Wood 1988, Casner-Lotto 1988, Dade County Public Schools 1988, Fairfax County Public Schools 1986, David 1989, Urbanski 1988).

Scattered early evidence suggests that shared decision making does have advantages. It appears to engage teachers in school issues on which they feel that they are the experts. Concomitantly, it reduces their sense of frustration that they are being treated as adolescents who don't have adult status on the job. It leads to higher morale -- at least at the beginning -- and a greater sense of professionalism (David 1988, 1989, Sickler 1988), and teachers often take greater responsibility for seeing that decisions are carried out (Carnoy and McDonnell 1989). At times, shared decision making even tends to reduce conflict between teachers and administrators. If teachers don't like the proposals that the principal makes, they have an avenue to discuss, debate, and influence the course of decision (Casner-Lotto 1988).

On the other hand, shared decision making presents new demands. It calls on teachers to undertake a variety of tasks that they have not previously been responsible for. It makes very heavy demands on their time. It asks them to become familiar with issues, like safety codes and district regulations, that they used to happily leave to the concern of administrators. It asks them to overcome a long history of cynicism about "fads" that periodically sweep through education, churn up a lot of excitement and effort, and are soon abandoned with very little to show for the energy expended. It asks them to renew their sense of excitement and hope.

This paper is about another demand that shared decision makes on teachers: the necessity to participate face-to-face with their colleagues and confront them on issues of moment for themselves and the school. In a shared decision-making environment, teachers have to engage other adults, negotiate, resolve differences, and come to decisions. Furthermore, they have to do this on unfamiliar territory, that is, in relation to tasks that are not teachers' usual business, tasks that they have to learn, tasks that ask them to extend themselves into new arenas of expertise. It is a far cry from the egg-crate organization of schools in which teachers rarely have to deal with other adults.

We draw the data for this discussion from the Study of Decision Making in High Schools in which we have been engaged for the past two years.[2] We have interviewed approximately 180 people on the staffs of 45 U. S. public high schools in

15 states -- administrators, department chairs, teachers, guidance counselors, librarians, and others. In 12 carefully selected high schools around the country, we have interviewed at least eight teachers and administrators. The data for this paper is drawn from all the schools in which we interviewed, but it comes overwhelmingly from the six high schools in our intensive sample that have instituted structures for teacher participation in decision making.[3]

We draw attention to the issue of relationships among teachers **not** to denigrate or undermine shared decision making, but rather to alert people to a series of unheralded issues that they might well have to deal with. Those who are engaged in, or considering engagement in, decision-making reforms should recognize that such reforms change more than teachers' time commitments. Everybody talks about time demands; everybody knows that shared decision making asks teachers to spend more time at school. But what seems to have received far less attention is that they also have to deal head-on with each other. And sometimes those dealings are contentious; sometimes they ruffle feelings; sometimes they upset the smooth tenor of school life. How and why this happens, and what can be done about it, are the topics we turn to.

THE SETTINGS

Among the high schools in which we interviewed intensively, six had structured mechanisms for teacher participation in school-level decisions.[4] One of the schools had begun the move to shared decision making within the year and was still in a state of transition. Remnants of the traditional mode of decision making survived alongside rudiments of the new structure. In three of the schools, participatory arrangements had been instituted from one to four years earlier. Another school had a form of shared decision making in previous years, along with formal student participation. However, as students assumed increasing power, teachers had become less willing to engage in the process. Recently a new mode of teacher participation was introduced. The sixth school was built 13 years ago with a participatory

philosophy and structure from the outset; the collective body of teachers ran the school. Over time it had developed a strong sense of mission, a deep feeling of trust, and a pervasive allegiance to the norms of teacher leadership. This last school, unlike all the others, was a relatively small rural high school.

These high schools are located in the Southeast, New England, the Middle West, the West, and the Northwest. One of them, as noted, is rural; one is suburban; four are urban, including three that are in the inner city. In socio-economic status, they run the gamut. One draws its student body from upper middle class families; two are primarily middle class; three are lower middle/working class schools.

CONFLICTS AMONG, BETWEEN, AND WITHIN TEACHERS

Who participates and who doesn't

One type of conflict that occasionally embroiled teachers had to do with who chose to participate and who chose not to. Those who got involved sometimes resented those who kept aloof. They believed that they were doing all the work and putting in all the time, while their idle colleagues reaped the benefits -- and not infrequently carped at them from the sidelines.

A director of guidance said:

> You have the core group, which I would say is between 20 and 30 people, generally sitting on most of the committees and task forces. And I have not seen, and this is unfortunate in our third year, a greater participation...[W]e're pushing, pushing, pushing to get more involvement, but it's tough, because meetings are after school, and it's tough to get people to attend, and I don't know.

Later she said: "The ones who don't speak out often are your skeptics, saboteurs, that group."

On their side, the non-participants offer good reasons for not becoming involved. Often they accept the label of skeptic. They have been around, they've

seen other movements, they have worked hard on curriculum committees or school improvement teams or other such bodies, and they have seen these come to naught. Let somebody else take a turn. They'll wait and see.

But sometimes they resent a new group, often of younger teachers, taking over. The young whippersnappers who participate in the new structures are being given a great deal of authority. As they see it, that authority is being taken away from the established leaders in the school. This shift from the recognized teachers with traditional status to the activists of the new structure causes bitter feelings.

This was particularly obvious in one school, where the principal encouraged a group of young enthusiastic teachers to contribute ideas at the beginning of the change effort. A veteran department chair said: "[T]his is where I mainly get my opinion that she [the principal] did not like the way departments functioned, and she wanted to do it some other way. So she established this group of elite, young, enthusiastic people with very little experience and frankly little common sense. And she put them into an elite position and gained the resentment of the whole school for it."

A union representative said:

> The restructuring process seemed to be more or less in the hands of some volunteers who were interested in restructuring, while the majority of the faculty who was either not interested at all, or certainly wasn't in the forefront of the thing, were kind of closed out. So there was a lot of animosity...They weren't people who had been recognized as teacher leaders in any way. And by and large, I don't want to say altogether,...almost all of them were fairly new teachers to the building. So it became a real camp.

Fortunately, after a period of considerable turmoil, arrangements were made to introduce a new committee structure that allowed for representation of all groups in the school to oversee the restructuring efforts.

In another school a teacher who is participating in the new collective leadership tried to explain why some of her colleagues are resentful. She says that

you have to understand the history of the school. Under previous principals, teachers were kept down, and they developed deep frustrations about their role.

> People in the school have been afraid of being manipulated by people in a leadership role...It may be worse for teacher-leaders than with real administrators. They [other teachers] were calling us junior administrators. Or maybe they were just more free to voice their suspicions with us.

On second thought, I think there was less trust with fellow teachers than with administrators. But there had been a long history of distrust. Some comes from discomfort, from fear of change, and you were there to take the flak. People had to get rid of grievances that they had saved up for years from different administrators.

Fortunately, this type of resentment of active participants was not universal. One teacher said, "I haven't seen envy...I've seen relief lots of times that somebody else will do this so that I don't have to."

Nevertheless, divisions can arise. Those who choose to take part may feel exploited by colleagues who stand idly by. Those who adopt a wait-and-see attitude may resent the self-importance of those who become active participants, particularly if the activists are new, young teachers who haven't been part of the informal leadership structure of the school. To the older established leaders, almost anything the mavericks propose seems to cast doubt on the way they themselves have done things in the past and thus challenges the legitimacy of their whole careers. In these kinds of situations, participants recommend keeping lines of communication open so that non-participants have an opportunity to be heard when they want to be. Inclusiveness, not exclusiveness, is the name of the game.

Conflicts among participants

Participatory processes bring teachers into contact with each other in ways with which they have not been familiar. Relationships are no longer simply social. They are now designed to forward particular purposes. In this environment behaviors which used to be tolerable now become extremely annoying. One example is the

teacher who talks too much. In the lounge, that was not a real problem. In a decision-oriented meeting, it drives his/her colleagues up the wall. Said a director of student activities:

> You know how it is with any meeting...Somebody always talks more than they should. Somebody always talks about something that is so stupid and irrelevant that they shouldn't be bringing it up...Well, we've got one guy...And you know, you look at him and say,"Why the hell don't you shut up once in a while? Let somebody else talk." So rather than taking over and controlling, they lose effectiveness because people are sick of listening to them.

It seems obvious from this person's remarks that he never voiced his opinions to the "talker" out loud. His dialogue is an interior one. Also interesting is his framing of the problem. He accepts with a certain fatalism that people in general are like this. He says: "[W]e could gather fifty people together and put them in one room. After one hour, we're going to have the same situation." He doesn't look at the situation as one that can be changed through experience or education. He doesn't think about ways in which people's participation can be improved. Rather he harks back to the principal:

> I've got no problem with the principal making decisions that he's trained to make. Thirty-two people [on the participatory body] -- they're not trained to make decisions...You know, that's my opinion.

In several of the schools, teachers find it difficult to be forthright with each other. Candor requires a set of attitudes and behaviors -- and the cognitive structure to support such behaviors -- that have not traditionally been part of a teacher's repertoire. When asked about the qualities that make for a good teacher-leader, a number of teachers specifically identify elements of candor as essential: a willingness to speak one's mind without flinching, a willingness to confront other teachers and administrators, an ability to hold one's ground. These are qualities they admire and which are often in short supply.

Instead what often happens is what this teacher describes: "People held a lot of things in and then they would vent them with other people, and it got to be kind of a catty, gossipy type way to solve these problems." Or what this teacher describes: "I found that there were more people who really liked [the new proposal], but they were scared to speak up. They didn't want their friends to be talking about them...Teachers were dishonest with themselves. In front of a group that they felt intimidated by, they would agree [with them]."

One of the things that impressed us most in the interviews was the frequent sense that teachers were unprepared to deal with differences of opinion within the faculty. For a number of participants in shared decision-making structures, an initial impulse is to back away from conflict. The people on the other side of the issue are their colleagues; they have to deal with many of them on a regular basis. They do not want to engender ill will. Therefore, they often try to paper over differences -- without resolving the underlying division. Or, occasionally, they want to bump the issue up to the principal to resolve. After all, the principal is still there. What is her/his job? S/he ought to be able to take care of sticky issues like this. That's what s/he's paid for.

One guidance counselor said:

> One of the negatives is putting yourself on the line. I mean when teachers have to share decision making (and a lot is at stake), you have to stand up and say your piece, or you're not going to be part of the decision. That's hard. It's easier to wait for directions from the principal...You will develop some adversary relationships that might not have otherwise happened, like you're going to get real pissed off at this particular person...You're going to start arguing, hopefully that will end up in something constructive, with people you never would have before. You really get some animosities....[I]t is hard dealing with personalities...It's a hard concept for teachers...

If candor is difficult and conflict is painful, even more demanding are the skills

to negotiate and reach agreement. Here a number of teachers recognize their shortcomings. One teacher first wholeheartedly endorsed the principles of shared decision making and then talked about the problems:

> I'll take this over the old "principal as God" thing that happened in my early career any day. Even if it means I have to put in more hours and not even get paid for it...[But] we're just not used to being given this type of responsibility...[P]erhaps we lack some of the communication skills, some of the decision-making skills that we need to have. [W]e need some more time in which to do these things.

Moreover, teachers are engaging in discussions about issues that are often new and unfamiliar to them. As will see in the final section, a few of them recommend that much more help and support is needed for them to succeed.

Some issues are particularly distressing for teachers to deal with. One is inadequate performance by a colleague. One teacher said:

> It's difficult for a...team that consists of the teachers to try to deal with the lack of performance of other teachers. We think that that's kind of a sensitive issue. I can't imagine a situation where we're telling another teacher that they're not as motivated as they should be.

Nevertheless, one school that was in the third year of its shared decision-making arrangement effectively handled the matter of an ineffective colleague. Although the teacher who reported the story punctuated her account with words like "apprehension" and "caution," she nevertheless told of the satisfactory transfer of a person who had not been performing well. The decision-making body, composed largely of teachers, managed the transfer, with the support of the principal, to the reported satisfaction of everybody concerned.

Another issue occasionally comes to the surface or, more often, lurks just below the surface of school people's comments. That is: When they take a position on an issue, on whose behalf are they talking? Some people speak only for themselves, and their colleagues see them as voicing their idiosyncratic beliefs, whether for good or for ill. Many more people tend to take a departmental

perspective on issues. They view the new participatory arrangements as another forum to advance the interests of their department. As one person put it, with some exaggeration: "Most teachers tend to look at things through a tunnel, and they see only what's involved in their discipline and not others." Other teachers, however, disagreed. They were cheered by their colleagues' willingness to take a school-wide view.

Still other teachers were seen as speaking for a faction (such as the old timers, the black community) or for a particular perspective (such as high academic standards or the tradition of the school the way it was in better times). Among those who were troubled by the problematic nature of representation, most were unsure whether they were supposed to speak for themselves or to represent a constituency. Should they exercise their own best judgment or self-consciously canvass their colleagues? Expectations were muddled. In the vacuum, departmental interests were the ones most likely to be pursued.

In sum, teachers often have a difficult time dealing with each other in a decision-oriented context. They are used to the old norms of live and let live. Now they have to engage with each other, take stands, confront conflict, negotiate differences. They have to listen to each other and judge the worth of each other's ideas. Very little in their background or training has prepared them for this kind of democratic politics.

Internal conflicts: new and old ideas within the same individual

Several teachers display ambivalence about the decision-making opportunities they now have. In a sense, they are saying: On one hand, I would like us to have a say in all decisions. On the other hand, I think there is a benefit in having a benevolent dictator. They are particularly likely to yearn for a benevolent dictator when they become impatient with the slowness and the interpersonal difficulties of reaching consensus. They recognize that decisions reached by consensus are generally more meaningful, even wiser, than other decisions and more apt to take hold. But sometimes decisions are needed quickly, or staff don't care one way or another, or

staff are hopelessly deadlocked, or they just want to be told what to do so that they don't waste their time.

In our interviews, there are several people who are drawn back and forth between the two positions. As the respondent argues for one side of the argument, s/he finds an exception to the position, usually a confounding exception that confuses him/her. They take up the other side of the case, only to run into exceptions or obstacles to that position.

A teacher says:

> I could see an advantage [to teacher participation] only when the teachers are truly given real decision-making power. Right now, they're really not. The principal when it comes down to it has overriding authority on any decision. Okay? So if all of the teachers on this committee wanted something and the principal was set against it, it's not going to get done.

He is saying that there is an advantage to shared decision making when the teachers' authority is real. Yet in the next quote, he is able to find an exception to this advantage. He is ambivalent about teachers having the entire responsibility for decision making. He finds exceptions to each assertion:

> In a democracy sometimes decisions are slow to come about, but when they do come about they have the support of everybody because everybody had an input into it, as opposed to a dictatorial decision where the decision could be made quickly but not everybody may be in agreement. In a school, you need to have a certain counter-balance. There are some decisions that need to be made and made fast and, you know, that's where you have your ultimate leader. But then there are times when the decision-making body needs to be able to have the right to challenge that decision. And they really don't.

He sees a need for a balance between democratic processes and dictatorial decisions. At times, the administrator should prevail. But then, highlighting his ambivalence, he takes it all back. The decision-making body must have the right to challenge the

leader. But they don't. So we come back to his initial statement that teachers don't have "real" decision-making authority.

This kind of ambivalence undermines the sense of empowerment that seems to be essential to effective teacher participation. When teachers are torn between wanting to have a strong role in decisions and wanting to abandon that role to administrators, they can not decide which responsibility should be theirs and they do not know how to claim it.

CONFUSION ABOUT THE LOCUS OF FINAL DECISION AUTHORITY

As some of the earlier discussion suggests, a problem that bedeviled shared decision making in many of the schools was uncertainty about where the final responsibility for decisions lay. It was not uncommon for the representative body to "make" a decision, only to have the decision reviewed by the principal or an administrative group, where changes could be introduced, and not uncommonly to go on to a third body (e.g., at the district level or the School Board), which could also modify or even reverse the original decision. In one school, teachers initiated a proposal to improve the performance of students in the classroom. Their proposal was passed on to a faculty committee which made modifications, then to a group of administrators who gave "input," and to a committee composed of parents who transformed it further. By the time the proposal cycled around the circuit and came back to them, they found it unrecognizable. Said one teacher: "It was hard to find where the original had gone."

Even more common was a state of uncertainty about who had the final word. There were occasions on which teachers believed that the decision-making body had come to a decision -- and then nothing happened. They expected the principal to follow through and see that the decision was implemented, but the principal believed that follow-through was part of their responsibility.

An episode in one school illustrates this kind of confusion. A group of teachers thought that it would be a good idea to extend the lunch period by 10 minutes and

to schedule all students for the same lunch period, rather than two or three different lunch periods in the day. They discussed the idea with the principal. She asked them whether they had considered all the implications of this option and gave them the state regulations to check through. They perceived her response as indicating hostility to the proposal. One teacher characterized the principal's attitude as: "Well, here's a book -- this thick -- of the state rules and regulations, and it's extremely complicated. And if you guys want to check this out, you can."

The committee had not expected having to examine the number of minutes of class time required by state law. Nor did they expect the next intercession -- the appearance of the head lunchroom worker at the faculty meeting. She came in with a five-page paper listing all the reasons why one lunch period was a bad idea, including the fact that it might cost one or two workers their jobs. The custodial staff also weighed in, opposing the change because it would result in overcrowding in the lunchroom, an overflow of students into the halls, and increased littering. With each development, the teachers' group became increasingly convinced that the administration opposed their idea, and "not only by the words that they spoke, but by their attitude, the way they spoke them, and their curtness about the whole issue, that we were just never going to get this change implemented...I think it just died a quiet death....It was kind of like word got around informally that, you know, this isn't going to happen."

For her part, the principal believed that if teachers were going to have responsibility for decisions, they should examine all aspects of the case. She wanted them to be thorough and weigh the pros and cons. They expected her to take care of technicalities; she hoped that they would. She said that they came with the vague concept that they wanted one lunch period. She asked them:

> How are you going to do that? [They said] Well, you know, we don't know. We want one lunch...[I said] OK, now what you have to look at is -- don't give me the concept, because you're part of this decision. Work out the plan. How is it going to work? What is it going to

> affect? How does it affect the lunchroom workers? How does it affect the kids, the fire codes? Can we seat everyone in the lunchroom? If not, are we allowing food out?...[They said] Well, we thought you'd do that. And so there is the [problem].

She knew that a number of the teachers believed that she was throwing up roadblocks. "And I responded that they're not blocks. They're realities that you have to look at. If you find a way, I'd love it." But the teachers lost heart and let the idea drop. They didn't seem to know how to proceed. They didn't have skills in analysis and planning. They didn't see analysis and planning as part of their job. And they became convinced that even if they worked out the plan, the principal would veto it. The episode ended with each side blaming the other in a welter of confusion about roles and responsibilities.

The question about which forum has the final say comes up repeatedly in our schools. It is obvious that schools need clear guidelines, visible to everyone, about which are the competent forums for decisions of specific kinds. Said one teacher:

> [P]ower is not well defined. Who has what power is not well defined. We were charged with this task, but it's not clear to me whether she can say, well, I just don't agree with this. My sense is that she feels committed to the process of having the group make decisions, making the model up, and that she has invested a certain amount of trust in us to do that. And she's been involved to the extent where she isn't going to get something that she's not expecting.

But it remains unclear whether the principal in this school can retract the authority if she disagrees with the outcome.

In another school in the early throes of shared decision making, a teacher told us: "When the issue about what to do with the seminars came up, they constantly had to decide who should decide. The decision eventually was made in three places." A guidance counselor in a different school said:

> [W]e don't know how to come to closure on most things. We know how to talk about it, we know how to table it, we don't know how to

> come to closure and implement it...[O]ur committee met six, seven times, you know, on days off. We came up with all these ideas, we met with the group as a whole: "This is what we'd like done." Generally speaking, that's where it ends. So we don't know how to close and implement.

Thus many teachers are unsure what "making" a decision entails. How far are they obligated to go beyond expressing their preferences? Do they have to find out about state and district rules, union contract provisions, community sentiment, and other matters that affect the feasibility of their proposals? Even if they take the extra steps to develop a workable plan, where does final authority for decision making lie? What happens when other groups want to make changes in the plan? Confusion reigns about where the buck stops.

ATTENTION HAS TO BE PAID

The advantages of shared decision making do not accrue simply by developing a structure and electing people to positions. As one of our respondents told us, many of the journal articles advocating teacher empowerment make the whole process sound too easy. What is needed is more than a change in formal structure; it is a change in the culture of the school as well. The values of staff, their expectations for themselves and each other, have to undergo a parallel transformation.

Such shifts require time. Experience is one way to acquire the knowledge and the allegiances that maximize benefits and minimize pain. For several of our schools, experience is the only thing they have to rely on. People in one school told us that when they began their foray into shared decision making, they had to start from scratch. There were no guidelines, no manuals, no one to ask, no place to go for help. They wished that they had more assistance -- and they believe that schools coming along after their trial-and-error experience should profit from the materials they have developed.

Trial and error is the hard way to build the knowledge and expertise that the process demands. Several thoughtful respondents made a plea for better preparation for teachers and administrators. The skills required for effective participation, say some, are particularly hard for teachers to grasp: they have been socialized for so long to compliance with orders from above (leavened with sub rosa griping) that they do not have the mental set to participate and take responsibility. Analogies with citizens of Eastern Europe who have recently been released from dictatorial regimes are only somewhat far-fetched. Training and coaching will be useful to help prepare school people for the demands of the new systems. One teacher noted, "There's a lot of potential with teachers, and we need to capitalize on that and train teachers how to be leaders, because that's not something that's involved in our training."

One department chair made an impassioned plea for training:

> [H]ere you have teachers who have been given the opportunity to make decisions. That is not the answer...Teachers have to be taught how to make the decisions. They have to have access to the information and to get to a point to be able to make intelligent decisions. Let me give you an example. How can I, who's never dealt with school budgets, make intelligent decisions about the budget? And how we need to allocate money in this fund or that fund or for, you know. I need to really be put through some staff development and to learn the history of how money has been spent in this school -- what the priorities have been over the years. I've got to know about all the different funds and how much money is discretionary, and where you put money and where you hold back money, and so forth...So simply giving teachers an opportunity to vote, that is not the answer. Because they have to be able to be given the information, have access to information to make those intelligent decisions...And so I feel as though in order for teachers to take on these leadership roles and to really make an impact with shared decision making, there has to be a lot preliminary work, a lot of training. You can't just come along and

impose this restructuring on a school or its system and not give people the training that they need in order to do it well.

As this respondent suggests, training is needed in the content of many of the issues that decision-making bodies have to face. Moreover, throughout the course of decision making, participants need access to reliable up-to-date information about the issues on the agenda. Even those schools in our study that appear most successful in managing participatory decision making do not display much sensitivity to the importance of good information, nor do they report much attention to the search for or use of relevant information in reaching decisions.

Training also seems to be needed in the processes of decision making. As we have seen, many people need help in taking forthright stands in front of their peers and making a case for the position they support. Equivalently, they need help in seeing other people's point of view. Many of us have difficulty putting ourselves in the other person's place and seeing the situation through his/her eyes. The ability to understand the basis on which opponents make their judgments -- the values they hold, the information base from which they are working -- is critical to good negotiation. Once we understand why we differ we are in a better position to resolve differences. Training in such skills might significantly advance the effectiveness of shared decision making.

Participants also need help with the arts of negotiation. Many of the respondents, directly or obliquely, talk about their wish for helping in managing conflict and reaching consensus. They know they often have to compromise, but they don't want to "wimp out." Staff development that focused on negotiation skills would be welcome.[5]

In some cases, people sense a need for practical skills in moving from agenda through decision to implementation. As a guidance counselor said:

> [I]t would be helpful if somebody would come in, and we have our agenda of what to accomplish. We don't know how to do it...You know, we would need somebody to set time lines: "You need to have

this done."... We need to know this needs to be done; your committee has to have this done by then. It has to be OK'd by the whole population. Then let's implement it by ___. We don't do that.

Above and beyond enhancing the skills of individuals, assistance may be necessary in helping to develop a culture in the school that supports participation. People in the school have to know that it is OK to disagree, that it is OK to confront one another, confront an administrator -- provided that the confrontation is meant for constructive purposes. The culture of the school should provide a sense of mutual respect and mutual trust.

One way in which this common trust can develop is through development of a common perception of the school's problems and needs. When people have been engaged with each other in diagnosing the school's situation and then reaching a mutually agreed-upon statement of school mission, they seem to find it easier to accept differences and to reach accommodations. They have a criterion against which to test possible decisions: the school's statement of vision and purpose. Participants will be more likely to accept a proposal that fits the collectively developed statement of school mission.

If all these homilies sound like the usual prescriptions from the ivory tower, with no practical how-to-do-it advice, let us turn to one school that seems to have put the advice into practice. This is, be it acknowledged, a relatively small school with about 700 students, and it has had 13 years of experience with shared decision making. It has had a participatory structure from the day it opened its doors. Its experience shows the kinds of behaviors and values, training and ongoing assistance, that have helped it become successful. Its history also illustrates the overwhelming advantages that faculty find in their collective decision structure.

All the respondents without exception perceive the school as unique and are committed to its philosophy and collective management. The management team is made up of the principal, four team leaders, and ad hoc members. The chair rotates. All proposals are referred to the management team for discussion and approval.

Three of the respondents to our interviews tried to describe the structure but had a hard time doing it. One tried to draw a diagram in the shape of a wheel: "I would put the principal in the middle and...he would be part of the management team...[Team leaders are] in charge of different clusters... From there...off the management team [I would put] the teachers and secretaries, which are part of the school day, and the kitchen and janitorial staff..." But she gave up on the chart. Another said:

> [I]t's not a pyramid. It's more like there's...people up here and then everybody else in that second line. There's very few people below that second line that are not willing to take over or capable...

Another person said: "[Y]ou can envision a parachute with many little things coming down...[Y]ou have an overlay system of several parachutes on top of each other." Obviously it is not a school whose structure fits comfortably in a regular organization chart.

Almost everybody in the school views the management team as the only body in the school with the authority to change policy. When a new principal came in who did not understand or accept the management team's authority, it was he who learned to adapt to the management structure. The management team takes up problems, considers proposals, gets information, reports back to the staff, and makes decisions.

Two other features of the school support and sustain the pattern of leadership. The first is that teachers initiate most of the suggestions for change. Our interviews asked each respondent to tell the story of a decision that had been made or considered in the school during the year. In this school every one of the stories was about a proposal initiated by a teacher. The issues discussed ranged from a proposal for team teaching in the math/science curriculum to development of a program to curtail school vandalism. As one teacher said: "The difference in our school is that it [leadership] starts from the bottom up."

Initiating new ideas is safe for teachers. They can speak up without any threat to their job security or peace of mind. As one person said:

> I think those who really want to play a leadership role can have just as much influence as leaders as the principal...I can not see in a traditional school the typical classroom teacher standing up in a staff meeting and saying, "This is bullshit," without expecting...crap to rain down on him for it...[Here] you're going to get at least respect. You're going to be heard.

The other striking feature of the school is the clarity to its participants of the school's student-centered philosophy. Throughout the interviews they refer to their philosophy as though everyone knows what it is; it is a very active presence in their thinking. Its essence has to do with their commitment to students. They have evolved several mechanisms, such as ongoing adviser-advisee relationships, that implement the philosophy. When decisions have to be made, they often ask how the proposal squares with their philosophy. Their commitment to it gives them a sense of anchorage. As one person said:

> [W]e all know why we're standing up. It's not a selfish reason. We stand up to say something because we mean well for the kids. That's the bottom line. As long as you're focusing on the kids, everything works out OK.

Not everything in this school is rosy, but they have developed an arrangement that releases teachers' creativity and gives all participants a sense of worth and trust. Unlike teachers in the other school who abandoned the idea of a one-period lunch when confronted by obstacles, teachers here try again. One teacher talked about her dissatisfaction with the current system of grading students. She has talked about it for years and has not received much support. She says she knows it's not enough to complain.

What I'm going to propose when we meet in the fall is that we get

> right on it...that we get a committee and that we have some key people on that have some input. And I've found two other teachers that are willing to work with me, so we're going to go, the three of us, as a proposal...I guess hopefully if we can be heard and we can work on it and get the staff to have a committee to talk about it, if we don't come up with something better, then at least we'll live with it more willingly.

In the early years, the school put considerable effort into staff training. In the fall of each year, the entire staff participated in Outward Bound types of activities, which provided physical challenge and required each of them to rely on the others for support. Regardless of their position in the school, their strengths and weaknesses were apparent to everyone. The experience was "a leveler of hierarchies." It also generated a climate of trust. One teacher said:

> We are very much a support group, in that usually from the time that people are hired, we would be put through a program, a [challenge] course...[E]veryone who was joining would actually be together, so we were considered to be a whole. Everybody was important...We had to go over these eight-feet walls. I don't like to climb walls. I don't have any arm strength or upper body strength. It was embarrassing. I found I had to depend on these people. I teach math...I found I could [call] on other people and I was getting their support.

A number of people expressed their disappointment that such training is no longer being offered.

In this school, the trust generated through shared training experiences carried over to the shared decision-making system. As one teacher said: "We were doing the support system with each other." Note the choice of verb. They don't just have a support system; they "do" it.

TOWARD THE FUTURE

Shared decision making yields many dividends in its mature stages. A key problem is getting there. Assuredly, there has to be a process of development; attitudes and behavior do not change right away. Those who embark on the course should be prepared to invest time. They have to recognize that training is foundational, fundamental, not a frill. The current leadership in the school, and in the district, has to make clear its commitment to shared decision making and to seeing through the transition from here to there.[6]

Moreover, lines of responsibility have to be clear. In several of the schools we studied, participants floundered around for considerable periods trying to decide who should decide -- or being taken by surprise that a decision that had been "made" was never implemented. Although this situation is not unique to shared decision making schools (unimplemented decisions can be located all over the landscape), it seems to cause more consternation here. Teachers begin to suspect that their authority is being undermined. Therefore, advance attention should be devoted to clarifying the relative spheres of authority. Meadows (1990) suggests that these matters be put in writing.

The role of the principal in shared decision-making structures needs particular attention. An administrator in one of our schools highlighted a key dilemma. He said that the participatory body can make the decisions, but if the decisions don't work, they are not the ones held accountable; when the central office evaluates, it's "the principal's butt that's in a sling." Officially and legally, the principal is accountable. Therefore, the appropriate division of responsibilities is a matter that requires exquisite care. And it needs to be communicated widely, so that everyone knows who has which authority. (See Mutchler and Duttweiler 1990.)

Teachers' and administrators' ability to resolve conflicts would be improved if they were clear about why they were getting involved in collective decision making in the first place. What we see emerging from our data is that schools with a clear philosophy and shared understandings of mission have a common ground on which

to negotiate differences. Everyone -- activist and bystander, teacher and administrator, faction A and department B -- can appeal to a common criterion when conflict flares: the mutual beliefs and sense of purpose that animate the school. The one school in our study with a mature system of collective decision making had developed a student-centered philosophy that provided the basis for argument and agreement.

The link from teacher participation in school decision making to better achievement by students is not clear or linear. Some elements in teacher participation systems may even detract from student learning, such as the time and energy diverted from the classroom to decision-making councils. Nevertheless, in the final analysis improved achievement depends on teachers, and as Johnson (1990) makes clear, teachers need better workplaces. Only as teachers find life in schools rewarding will good teachers stay in the classroom, able young people be recruited to teaching, and all teachers freed from the restraints and annoyances that divert them from the best teaching of which they are capable. Shared decision making, when it successfully copes with the conflict it generates, is one possible strategy toward that end.

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NOTES

1. Malen et al. (1989) say that school-based management has been adopted at least in part because it is a means to quell conflict and restore confidence in the school system. In their words, it is "economically appealing" (i.e. cheap), "ideologically compelling," and "symbolically potent" (p. 27). Since participatory decision making is often part of school-based management arrangements, much the same argument can be made regarding the adoption of shared decision making.

2. The study is being done under the auspices of the National Center for Educational Leadership at Harvard University. The Center is a consortium of Harvard University,

Vanderbilt University, and the University of Chicago, and is funded by the Office of Educational Research and Improvement of the U. S. Department of Education.

3. The interview consisted of a series of open-ended structured questions about a decision that was made in the school in the current year. Respondents identified the issue about which they chose to talk, and then responded to a series of questions about the processes of decision making. They also spoke about the advantages and disadvantages of teacher participation, the characteristics of teacher leaders, and attitudes and behaviors within the faculty. In addition, they gave information about the school and the student body.

4. That six of the 12 schools had mechanisms for teacher participation says nothing about the frequency of such arrangements in the population of schools. We chose schools throughout the country based primarily on the degree to which they provided for teacher participation. Our aim was to represent the continuum of teacher authority within high schools.

5. Strusinski (1990) reports on answers to a question on training needs from 30 schools that had two full years of experience with shared decision making. Most frequently requested was training in professional skills. Second was training on working in groups.

6. Lieberman (1988) and Guthrie (1986) also recommend higher pay for teacher-leaders.